5-1968

Some Aspects of Nineteenth Century American Folk Life as Reflected in the Shaker Journals of South Union, Kentucky

Jean Thomason
Western Kentucky University

Thomason,

Jean Healan

1968

SOME ASPECTS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN FOLK LIFE AS REFLECTED IN THE SHAKER JOURNALS OF SOUTH UNION, KENTUCKY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Jean Healan Thomason

May 1968

SOME ASPECTS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN FOLK LIFE
AS REFLECTED IN THE SHAKER JOURNALS OF SOUTH UNION, KENTUCKY

APPROVED May 28, 1968
(Date)

Kenneth W. Clarke
Director of Thesis

George E. McCelvey

Willson E. Wood

John D. Minton
Dean of the Graduate School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

I. SPRING 4

II. SUMMER 20

III. FALL 27

IV. WINTER 33

V. TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF SPEECH 38

VI. BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS 50

VII. AILMENTS AND TREATMENTS 58

VIII. PECULIARLY SHAKER 66

CONCLUSION 72

BIBLIOGRAPHY 75

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1805 and continuing past the end of the century, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, a religious sect commonly called "Shakers," established and maintained a colony at South Union, Kentucky. This colony was located about fourteen miles from Bowling Green near the Gasper River. It was begun as a farming community and remained as such throughout its existence. Attendant farm crafts and industries were included as a part of the community's life and economy.

Most of the members of the colony were "gathered in" from the surrounding region. There were a few South Union members, however, who came from the parent colony (New Lebanon, New York) and stayed for a number of years before returning to the East. The early members, largely Kentucky settlers converted from the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist faiths, brought with them the traditions, beliefs, customs, and mores of the Kentucky frontier life. The idea of the religious community was brought in by the Shaker missionaries from the East, but some of the forms of worship and expressions of their fervor reflected the prevailing atmosphere of the religious life of Kentucky in the early years of the

century. Thus the new Believers integrated their own folk customs and traditions into this new mode of communal living, prescribed routine, and celibacy. Some of their methods of work and play were especially useful for this group manner of living. Many of the time-honored frontier community activities were adapted and intensified in the everyday life of the society; hence they perhaps outlived the same customs in the secular world from whence they had come.

This study will describe many of these practices which have been recorded in the journals of the society at South Union and will identify origins, similarities and differences as they relate to the practices of the people of the surrounding geographic region.

In this agrarian society the daily routine was mainly seasonal, the Shakers' work and their recreation depending on the demands and the benevolence of the soil, the forests, and the weather. My commentary, as a consequence, can be presented in the same fashion. Admittedly, some of the indoor work could have taken place at any time of the year. Yet the reasonable application of time and effort to inside work would be when field work and other seasonal tasks had been done.

Other traditional aspects of the colony can be noted in their customs and beliefs, their notions about the nature and treatment of diseases, their patterns of speech, and even in their Shaker songs and dances.

CHAPTER I

Spring

"Under all is the land."[1] The Shakers depended on the proper use, the cultivation, and the preservation of the land for their livelihood just as did most of the people in Kentucky in the early nineteenth century. The basic process of clearing the land of trees and brush in order to prepare for crops was an important task in the early years of the colony. This back-straining work became more bearable when the work was made into a "bee" or "night frolick." Many instances of such land clearing (or "grubbing") bees were recorded over the years, usually during the month of March. One entry stated that "nine brn grubbed 2 acres today of very hard grubbing."[2] After the trees were down, and the roots up, the brush was easier to clear:

> Night Frolick -- About 50 Brethren from the Chh assembled at the East House Clearing about dark for the purpose of gathering and burning brush. The sight was beautiful. We burned the brush clean off of 2½ acres before 9 & returned home.[3]

---

[1] Real Estate Salesman's Handbook (Chicago: National Association of Real Estate Boards, 1963), p. 16.

[2] Shaker Record A, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, p. 301.

[3] Ibid., p. 302.

Another entry described the condition of the brethren during the work:

> Burning and Brush Picking -- 10 Brn cleaned and burnt 5 acres today & no one boozy -- even clamorous.[4]

The last line was a sideways comment on the prohibition of strong liquors at the colony. The same type of work is listed also as a "Night Frolick -- all hands picking & burning brush on new ground."[5] Burning of the brush was perhaps accomplished more easily in the early evening when the wind had died down, as this was often the time of day indicated for the burning.

This clearing of the land and burning of the brush was a necessary chore all across the frontier. Not always did the regular farmers make a "frolic" of it, but the sight of the cleared land and the bright fire must have brought satisfaction to the grubbers in spite of the hard labor required.

> Of all the labours of the forest, I consider that of dragging and burning the limbs of trees the most delightful. To me it made toil a pleasure. The rapid disappearance of what was thrown upon the fire gave the feeling of progress -- the flame was cheering. . . .[6]

---

[4] Ibid., p. 305.

[5] Ibid., p. 302.

[6] Daniel Drake, Pioneer Life in Kentucky, ed. Emmet Field Horine (New York: Henry Schuman, 1948), p. 38.

Log-rolling was usually a frolic both in the Shaker communities and elsewhere. The work was interspersed with neighborly gossip and tall tales.

> The neighbors gathered and piled up the large logs and also spun the customary yarns. I shall probably remember longest of all that I have learned, the yarns spun at log-rollings. . . .[7]

Barn-raising, a frontier community endeavor from the earliest days, was also familiar to the Shakers. In 1832 "The Brethren from the different families went to Water Vliet [one of the out-farms] & raised their big barn."[8] Gordon Wilson describes the "poetry of the old log barns that were raised in a single day."[9] The man who could "carry the corner" was most admired:

> It took skill to carry a corner. Only the most agile young men could do this. The rabble could tote logs and push them up the skids. . . . There was a long season's work after the framework of the barn was up, but the romantic part of the structure was community-built.[10]

Always observing the maxim of "Treat the land well and it will treat you well," the Shakers systematically set out or planted trees on their land. In March, 1817, they set out black locusts at the new Brick house. The scribe

---

[7] Gordon Wilson, Passing Institutions (Cynthiana, Kentucky: The Hobson Book Press, 1944), p. 31.

[8] Shaker Record A, p. 362.

[9] Wilson, Passing Institutions, p. 47.

[10] Ibid.

who copied these early records reported that the locusts thrived for fifty years. They were finally cut down for firewood and pines were planted in their place.[11] Another March planting record shows the planting of "upwards of 500 white walnut trees or (butternut trees) in the bend of the creek."

In the first half of the nineteenth century, flax was one of the most important crops in Kentucky. In the days before cotton was readily available, flax and wool were the materials used for clothing of the common folk. From 1812 to 1834 the Shaker journals have several references to flax growing and harvesting. The entries show that the flax was pulled, spread, taken up and scutched.

> Big Days Work -- Daniel Barnett (colored Br.) scutched 130 lbs of cleaned flax from the Break today -- more than doubled the best days work of others -- the flag for Dave.[13]

Many acres must have been planted in flax since the scribe wrote, in 1834, that eleven acres were pulled, and a few days later the brethren and sisters took it up and put it under cover. At another time the sisters pulled thirty acres.[14]

---

[11] Shaker Record A, p. 167.

[12] Shaker Record B, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, p. 84.

[13] Shaker Record A, p. 320.

[14] Ibid., pp. 179, 395.

Other writers described the growing of flax during this period. One account stated that "from seed to loom flax required about a year. . . . Flax was sown, weeded, pulled and retted, broken and swingled."[15] Daniel Drake describes the working with flax as hard labor:

> The pulling threshing, spreading out to rot, taking up and stacking flax were works which no one need to covet. Many a long day through many a year I had my hands made sore by them. Other manipulations were postponed until winter. It was then dried over a slow fire, sunk below the surface of the ground, and "broke," a very hard work for a boy. . . . The "swingling" was better fitted for boys and constituted the only thing in the cultivation and preparation of flax in which I took pleasure. It required skill and, although it tired the right arm, . . . It covered one with tow & shives and at night could be weighed which gave interest to the labour.[16]

Further work on the flax included "hatcheling out the tow, and preparing in knots the beautiful fibre for the distaff."[17] Preparing the linen after it came from the loom was described as "especially difficult requiring as many as thirty bleachings to produce a white cloth,"[18] The bleaching was done by unrolling the linen on the grass, sprinkling it with water, and leaving it out under the sun.

---

[15]Fannie Casseday Duncan, When Kentucky Was Young (Louisville: John P. Morton & Company, 1928), p. 111.

[16]Drake, pp. 68-69.

[17]Ibid., p. 103.

[18]Russel Blaine Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 133.

This process was repeated day after day until the linen had reached the desired whiteness.[19]

The dyes used in coloring the cloth were generally home-made. The forest itself furnished many dyes:

> A "standing" dye stuff was the inner bark of the white walnut from which we obtained that peculiar and permanent shade of dull yellow -- the "Butternut" . . . . The "hulls" of the black walnut gave us a rusty black. Oak bark, with copperas as a mordant. . . afforded a better tint of the same kind.[20]

Another writer of that period recounted some of these and other substances being used for coloring:

> Out of white walnuts she extracted the dull yellows; out of madder, soft reds; out of cedar berries, dove colors; out of black walnut, browns; out of indigo plants, lovely blues.[21]

In 1831 two of the brethren journeyed to Nashville to get material for grinding Indigo.[22] Even into the present century some eastern Kentucky women still made their own dyes. In the Couch family the mother used walnut roots and chestnut-oak roots for yellows; a darker yellow was obtained from mulberry roots.[23]

---

[19] Drake, p. 104.

[20] Ibid., p. 101.

[21] Dye, p. 116.

[22] Shaker Record A, p. 349.

[23] Leonard W. Roberts, Up Cutshin and Down Greasy (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 25.

Wool came from the Shakers' own sheep and May was the month for shearing. Brethren are reported as attending to the carding, while the sisters did the spinning and weaving. Some of their wool was sold outside the society after the needs of the village families were met. Toward the end of the 1830's the Shakers were buying some cloth and recorded that "Nankeen" trousers were being cut for making. This durable cotton of brownish yellow fabric proved a serviceable material for the meeting-day suits for the brethren. After cotton and other materials became available, it was more practical for the Shakers to purchase the needed goods for clothing. However, the looms and spinning wheels stayed busy making sheets, toweling, and other household items.

The several families in each society operated as economic units, but would lend a hand or food to a neighbor just as neighbors on the frontier would do. In 1834 the wheat crops were badly injured by the rust, and the Center Family gave ten acres of wheat to the East Family -- "Doing as we would be done by, in a small degree," the scribe quotes Robert Johns.[24]

Just as any farmer looks forward to spring, so did the Shakers, and the journalists record the first roasting ears, the first green peas, and potatoes "the size of an egg." When an earlier freeze threatened the new crops, one poetic

---

[24] Shaker Record A, p. 395.

writer, showing the influence of Oliver Goldsmith, observed, "Winter lingers in the lap of Spring."[25]

Other early spring activities before the full-scale field work began included lath-making, basket weaving, road work, mattress making, and cheese-making. The laths, usually made from oak and used as a foundation for plaster walls, were made as needed. On one occasion the scribe wrote that the brethren made 100,000 from March 23 to April 24. Baskets made by the Shakers were known for their utility and simple beauty. They made all sizes for various uses and recorded making half-bushels in quantity for sale.[26]

> They were unique in that they were suited to the purpose for which they were woven -- as deep, sturdy egg baskets which resembled nests; wide, flat wash-baskets of open weaves whitened by the draining of whey and constant scrubbing. Again there were immense flat baskets for holding herbs or barks while drying in the sun and chip baskets lined with leather for fine kindling. But the loveliest work of their fingers were the sewing and knitting baskets. These were fashioned out of finely split poplar, closely woven and beautifully polished and finished and often daintily lined.[27]

Most farm families were able to construct usable baskets and a few people in each community developed this practice

---

[25] Oliver Goldsmith, The Traveller, l. 172. "Winter lingering chills the lap of May."

[26] Shaker Record A, p. 318.

[27] Caroline Piercy, The Valley of God's Pleasure (New York: Stratford House, 1951), p. 140.

to a fine art. In the Park City -- Cave City -- Horse Cave area there are today a few families who still take pride in this careful craftsmanship.

Although the Shakers considered themselves as set apart from the world, they still contributed to work required of the citizenry. Kentucky law required that each adult male give six days' work each year to maintain the public roads.

> We came armed with picks, shovels, and other farm tools. In smaller groups we worked along the road, filling up mudholes, ditching the road-way so that water would run off rather than down it, and occasionally straightening out some crooked stretch. . . .[28]

After the discontinuance of the use of alcoholic beverages in the Shaker communities, the journalist reported:

> Road Work -- All hands hard at it & did a great deal of necessary work -- & "nary Julip nor punch nor Egg Nog."[29]

Heretofore this hard work was accompanied by an occasional reviving of the spirits with a bottle. No doubt the Kentuckians on the outside of the colony continued both the road work and the tippling.

Early in the life of the village a tan yard was begun. One of the spring chores was to go out into the woods and peel the tan bark from the trees. The Shakers probably used oak bark, since this was commonly used in the Kentucky area,

---

[28]Wilson, Passing Institutions, p. 66.

[29]Shaker Record A, p. 305.

although hemlock could also have been used.[30] This would be layered with the hides in a vat or depression in the ground and flooded with water to begin the process. Again combining in good measure the elements of work and play, one journal entry records a two-fold trip:

> Fishing Party -- . . . took two teams & started for Green River for the double purpose of catching some fish and bring home the Bark peelers.[31]

The Shaker distillery was reported operational in the spring of 1823, but by 1828 the Shakers regarded the use of liquor as inconsistent with their temperate way of life. South Union officially adopted a resolution to stop the use and manufacture of whiskey. They did, however, continue to make wines, beer, cider, cordial and brandy for medicinal use and for sale. They used a distillery of a neighbor when one was needed. Evidently not all the members of the colony were in agreement with the decision:

> Rather Bad -- Brethren continue taking apples to the Still House -- for Brandy & cash. . . .[32]

> Thieving -- Some scamps at the Junior Order broke into the cellar by sawing the iron rods & stole demijohn of wine and some Brandy. Penetentiony Birds.[33]

In 1833, the first hair mattress was made at South Union. The Shakers had very few horses and many hogs

---

[30]Interview with Dr. Gordon Wilson, March 21, 1968.

[31]Shaker Record B, p. 322.

[32]Shaker Record C, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, p. 200.

[33]Ibid., p. 204.

during this time, so the hair used in the mattresses was probably hog hair.[33]

The swarming of the bees was an event worthy of note. This record shows them to be as busy as they are reputed to be:

> The Bees that were hived on the 14th sent out a swarm today -- Made new comb raised a brood & sent out a swarm in 14 days -- Smart Bees --[34]

Daniel Drake described, as a frolic, the hunting of a bee tree with some of his friends and neighbors.[35] He was, no doubt, familiar with the adage,

> A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay
> A swarm of bees in June is worth a silver spoon
> A swarm of bees in July is not worth a fly.[36]

The South Union Shakers apparently experimented with different kinds of bees, for one entry states that two stands of "the Italian variety" of bees had been received as a gift from the colony at White Water.[37]

Although most of the initial clearing of the land for cultivation was done in the earlier years, each spring some areas needed work. In 1860 when most of the land had been in use for more than a half century, the brethren "made a Bee" and cleared off "the Know"[38] -- then fifty sisters

---

[33] Shaker Record A, p. 375.

[34] Shaker Record B, p. 117.

[35] Drake, p. 131.

[36] Wilson Interview, March 21, 1968.

[37] Shaker Record C, p. 129.

[38] Hill or knoll. See footnote

joined the forty brethren as they raked up leaves and put them around the trees. They finished the bee with a supper which the sisters had brought.[39] Sometimes their outings were simply for pleasure. "Outs," "Pic-Nics" and "Woods-Feasts" were names given to their visits away from the village to the fields or woods for an outdoor meal. These trips might be taken to visit the brethren who were getting out timber and staying for some days at an "out-farm," as they termed the lands owned away from the main community. Such trips, with their singing and feasting, were regarded as needed exercise and recreation for the hard-working Shakers. One "woods-feast" was said to have been "gotten up" by Aunt Sarah Robinson, and the scribe added this note, "She must be a comfort to somebody."[40] It can be noted that the older members were among these "walk-outs," and on one occasion the ages of several walking out to the Knobs were given as follows: "Jency Dillon, 73 years old; Eldress Dana, 67, H. L. Eades, 61, and Eldress Betsy, 56."[41] The journalist, who was one of the hikers, pointed out proudly that they returned in time for dinner at the regular hour. These outings are comparable to the religious and political gatherings on the outside where meals were served together.

---

[39] Shaker Record B, p. 218.

[40] Shaker Record A, p. 394.

[41] Shaker Record C, p. 132.

In addition to these trips for recreation, the South Union Shakers were often out and about in the springtime to gather berries and fruit for table use and later for sale. Strawberries and cherries were welcome changes from the winter larder. Apparently there were no cherry trees on the grounds at South Union but the members arranged with neighboring farmers for cherries. At one time the records show they went to Hoffmans, three miles below Russellville, and got thirty-six buckets full.[42] Strawberries were grown in the village with great success: "5 bushels more of strawberries gathered this morning before breakfast."[43] In a turn-about fashion, their neighbors would come and pick strawberries from the Shaker fields when there were enough to sell. Furthermore, the journalist laments in several entries, many "good neighbors" came after dark to pick them without permission.[44]

Contests were always popular on the frontier, and early Kentuckians were ever ready to test their skill in almost any match.

> The Kentuckians were a fun loving people and always liked, in some way, to have a contest in their fun.[45]

In Cyrus Edwards' Stories of Early Days, a flapjack-eating contest at Bear Wallow attracted a large crowd in Barren

---

[42] Ibid., p. 207.

[43] Ibid., p. 43.

[44] Shaker Record B, p. 322.

[45] J. F. Cook, Old Kentucky (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908), p. 152.

County.[46] Within the South Union community the contests took on a more serious purpose. On April 26, 1828, H. L. Eades and Milton Robinson vied for honors in a "straw plaiting contest." After seventeen hours of work Eades was the winner, plaiting 120 yards of this material for hats. Eades' comment, upon winning the contest, shows a marked contrast to the boasting associated with usual frontier matches:

> I consider the race a draw, Milton's was as much better as mine was longer.[47]

In the same period two of the brethren had a shoe-making race and each finished six good pairs of shoes between five in the morning and nine at night.[48]

Those who esteem the farm dinner bells as valuable antiques might be surprised to learn that horns and shells were used for calling the men from the fields in the earlier years. The Shaker sisters blew the trumpet fifteen minutes before meal-time, and the brethren were cautioned to "lay down or quit their work & come to the house & be ready to go in together in unison."[49] Elsewhere in Kentucky, the conchshell was blown to summon the men from the fields.[50]

---

[46] Cyrus Edwards, Cyrus Edwards' Stories of Early Days, ed. Florence Edwards Gardiner (Louisville, Kentucky: The Standard Printing Company, Inc., 1940), p. 237.

[47] Shaker Record A, p. 305.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., p. 350.

[50] Drake, p. 108.

The sisters at South Union raised silk worms and made silk cloth for kerchiefs and handkerchiefs, beginning in the early 1830's and continuing at least to the early 1860's. Several entries indicate the importance of this bit of luxury to these plain people, and the care which the process required:

> Silk Cocoons -- Sisters picked the first crop this season. Whole am't of cocoons 137 pounds -- in a lb is 805 cocoons which makes the whole of this crop 110,285 cocoons.[51]

> Silk Domestic -- The Sisters all appeared dressed in their home made silk kerchiefs the first time at So. Union.[52]

> Sisters New Years Present to the Brethren -- As soon as we arose from our supper we repaired to the meeting room to receive a New Years gift from the good Sisters, consisting of a beautiful silk neck kerchief made from the cocoon by their own hands. . . . We all thanked our good Sisters & hope we shall all remember their goodness, when this present is worn out. Trust our love may never wear out. The present season they have made about 12 lbs of reeled silk -- rather 11½ reeled silk 5½ of floss.[53]

> Silk Business -- has been carried on by the sisterhood for some time, with tolerable success [dated 1859] they have just taken from the loom a vew [?] of 100 yards making 164 fine white pocket kerchiefs for sale @ $12. per dozen --[54]

There are few references to the production of silk generally in Kentucky during these years. However, one publication

---

[51] Shaker Record A, p. 364.

[52] Ibid., p. 359.

[53] Ibid., p. 372.

[54] Shaker Record B, p. 211.

states that Kentucky produced 6,970 pounds of silk in 1846.[55] The Franklin Farmer, an agricultural newspaper published in the thirties and forties, advocated crop rotation, stock breeding, and innovations in farming, but warned farmers against popular fads such as raising silk worms.[56]

That this farming community was busy and productive in the spring of the year is again indicated in this comment by the scribe:

> Sisters rather pressed with business -- too many irons in the fire -- Silkworm raising -- preserve making -- Starch making -- Bonnet making -- Hat making.[57]

---

[55] John M. Keith, Jr., "The Economic Development of the South Union Shaker Colony 1807-1861" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of History, Western Kentucky State College, 1965), p. 58, citing J. D. B. DeBow, The Industrial Resources of the Southern and Western States (DeBow's Review: New Orleans, 1853), II, 403.

[56] F. Garvin Davenport, Ante-Bellum Kentucky, A Social History, 1800-1860 (Oxford, Ohio: The Mississippi Valley Press, 1943), p. 194.

[57] Shaker Record C, p. 43.

CHAPTER II

Summer

In the early years of the society at South Union, the summer was not a time of "laying by" and resting from the spring labors. The Shakers took advantage of the reduction in field work to pursue the building of structures and attendant facilities.

Brickmaking was a home and community industry during these early days in Kentucky. The journalist notes in 1811 that John McComb and others "commenced moulding bricks."[1] These bricks were used in the construction of residential dwellings, work buildings, wash houses, dairy and preserve houses, and other structures. All buildings were important and received careful workmanship. On June 23, 1817 the journal contains: "Brick Kiln -- Burning 150,000" and a marginal notation "27th well burned."[2] Sometimes the journalist chides the brethren for miscalculating and not having enough brick on the first burning for the building in question.

The Shakers also made their own shingles in the first half of the century until mass production caused this to become an unprofitable expenditure of time and energy.

---

[1] Shaker Record A, p. 88.

[2] Ibid., p. 169.

The riving out of the shingles was another accomplishment of the early craftsman elsewhere in the region. The Shakers record that they painted the meeting house roof with lamp-black in oil. Although the journals are silent about the matter, the Shakers probably made their own lamp-black in a manner common to the region. This was usually done in a small house where constant fires formed soot for such use.[3] Later in the century a slate roof was put on the "New Barn."[4]

Typical of their farsightedness was the building of the ice house in the summer of 1819.[5] It would be put to use more and more as their produce and meat increased.

Nail-cutting was also a summer occupation. Sister Bobbitt of the Harvard Shaker Society "conceived the cutting of nails from a sheet of metal instead of forging them singly,"[6] and at South Union as early as June 1, 1813 nail cutting had begun.[7] Although not all farms in the region had their own blacksmith shop, the farmers made use of the nearest one at

---

[3]Wilson Interview, March 21, 1968.

[4]Shaker Record C, p. 281.

[5]Shaker Record A, p. 191.

[6]Margurite F. Melcher, The Shaker Adventure (Princeton: University Press, 1941), p. 134.

[7]Shaker Record A, p. 97.

hand. Here again, the Shakers had such a shop at South Union. One entry boasts that

> Henry Dillon, youth, Blacksmith, made 35 pairs of Horse Shoes by 5 o'clock p. m.[8]

No mention is made of the making of ice shoes (with a point to dig in the frozen ground), but they may have used some of these. The journal reflects success in the physical prowess of this blacksmith but laments in another entry of his spiritual attainment:

> Backing Out -- Henry Dillon this morning after breakfast left for parts unknown. Young stout fresh hearty good blacksmith. It seems that BlackSmiths are hard to save![9]

A new carriage was made in June of 1817 at South Union,[10] and later the journals report the frequent use of one called a "dearborne." Their society craftsmen exhibited amazing versatility in their abilities, from molding bricks to making wheels. Again, this was much like the small community in the 1800's, with the various shops and skills.

Other construction projects were the raising of the mound cistern and making of lime kilns. One kiln turned out 1100 bushels of lime at one burning.[11] Standard uses of lime were as an ingredient in plaster, mortar, and bleach.[12]

---

[8] Ibid., p. 309.

[9] Ibid., p. 336.

[10] Ibid., p. 169.

[11] Ibid., p. 352.

[12] Interview with Dr. Gordon Wilson, March 25, 1968.

The fruit required attention during the summer months. Hundreds of apple trees had been set out during the first decade of the society at South Union, seven hundred being put out in one year.[13] The journals contain many entries about the gathering of apples. They were put to use in many ways, for jelly, apple butter, cider, and apple beer. This last was made from dried apples, and a present-day informant recalls the recipe as including cut-up apple peelings, brown sugar and yeast.[14] The Shakers apparently used all of the fruit, rather than just the peelings, in making their beer. For use in the drying of the fruit, the Shakers made fruit kilns for each family. Most of the farm families in that day simply spread the fruit out on a shed roof day after day to dry in the sun. No doubt this was not a practical method for the Shakers, since they processed such large quantities of apples.

Plums, peaches, and late cherries were also picked in the summer as well as wild strawberries which were especially abundant in the area around South Union.[15]

One summer outing that combined recreation and productive work was blackberrying. The brethren joined the sisters in these outings since the harvest demanded little of their time. They would go from ten to twenty

---

[13] Shaker Record A, p. 196.

[14] Interview with Dr. Gordon Wilson, March 26, 1968.

[15] Ibid.

miles, both to their own out-farms and to neighboring farms, to gather the berries for jelly, for preserves, and to make up in cordial for sale. The scribe comments that these trips were profitable in two ways:

> . . . 1st a respite & recreation from the daily routine of labor & toil and 2nd furnishing the families with plenty for table use. . . .[16]

The work with the flax continued on into June and sometimes into July. The practical Shakers worked on Sunday if the need arose, but not without some censure from the scribe:

> Flax lifting -- Sabbath Infringement -- The brethren turned out this Sabbath day & lifted, bound & hauled in 3 acres of flax -- The excuse for this breach is that the flax is sufficiently rolled [rotted] & should rain fall on Monday the crop would be ruined (some excuse better than none).[17]

The Shakers also produced oil by grinding the flax seed.

Wheat was an important crop with the Shakers since over one hundred acres yearly is reported as being sown. During June the workers began the harvesting of the wheat.

> The Sturdy Cradlesmen finished cutting down the field of wheat over the creek.[18]

---

[16] Shaker Record A, p. 420.

[17] Ibid., p. 417.

[18] Ibid., p. 336.

The scribe did not always frown on Sunday work. This entry indicates a feeling that honest work represents the true Christian life:

> Bending the Sabbath -- 27 young brn of the Chh bound and handstacked 20 acres of wheat today -- right good worship![19]

After the Shaker decision to stop making or drinking whiskey one harvest-time report stated that it had resulted in more good hay than in any previous year and all without a drop of "how come you so."[20] Daniel Drake has described the art of stacking the hay so that it would turn off the rain and not be blown over by the winds.[21]

Two customary farming practices in which the South Union members specialized produced more than their needs and enough for sale. These were the growing of seeds and the pressing of herbs. The seed industry was by far the larger in quantity and in extent of sale. Seeds were peddled by land and by river boat to an increasingly expanding market. In 1831 the South Union Shakers packaged 32,290 seed "papers" for sale. This figure had reached 56,856 in 1834, and by 1837 it had increased to 170,000.[22] Squares of paper were cut and pasted to make a bag, then imprinted with their

---

[19] Ibid., p. 323.

[20] Ibid., p. 308.

[21] Drake, p. 66.

[22] Shaker Record A, p. 355; Record B, p. 35.

small printing press, filled, sealed, and boxed. These packages were sold for five to seven cents each. The Shakers continually tried to improved the seeds with imports and new varieties. Evidently the care that went into the growing of these seeds was as painstaking as that of the neighboring farmer as he preserved his seed for the next year. There are many references throughout the journals to the production of seeds.

One of the sisters summed up the state of the colony in her journal on a June day:

> As to our fare in general, we have the Cream of the Earth -- Plenty of meal & flour, milk & Butter, Irish Potatoes, Sweet potatoes, apples, & peaches, dried & canned, Strawberries, Asparagus, Lettuce, Radishes, Peas & Greens -- preserves, honey & Molasses -- Beef, Mutton, Chickens & Eggs -- Buttered Waffles, fritters & Doughnuts, Boiled & baked dumplings (or "toad in the hole") Peach & apple pie plant pies & pudding & dip & Sweet Cake, Tea Coffee & Sugar -- A variety of these and indeed other articles have furnished the table for the past four weeks.[23]

---

[23] Shaker Record C, p. 45.

CHAPTER III

Fall

Harvest time at South Union was marked with activity in the fields and in the kitchens. The corn was cut down and "stooked."[1] The seed business kept many hands busy in this season. The papers were filled and boxed for sale for the river trade and for the overland peddling trips. Seed cabbage was buried for the next year, following the usual practice for this biennial plant.

The late apples were called "saving" or "winter" apples. From the bruised and refuse apples, the Believers made cider for sale and local consumption. One fall one hundred eleven barrels of cider were made. Some of these apples were put away for winter use, and of course the usual jellies, apple butter, and dried apples were prepared. The Shakers valued this fruit with its variety of uses and were thankful for "an uncommon plentiful season."[2] In October, 1835, "all sparable hands are to be engaged gathering apples & making cider."[3]

---

[1]See discussion of this word on page 40.

[2]Shaker Record A, p. 426.

[3]Ibid.

Just as the regional families had corn huskings (more often called "shuckings" in Kentucky), the Shakers made this work into a contest and evening of fun:

> Our custom here. . . is to bring the corn in, & throw it out in a long ridge, then have corn huskings. When all turn out -- frequently by morn moon light -- In night gatherings & huskings the pile is always divided & two captains choosing alternately of the company present -- strike in with no little cheering to see who can get done first frequently Negroes from the country attend. As in all such cases -- the bottle is handed round, or rather a portion is measured out to each once or twice during the husking frolick, to warm them & keep up the spirit until the job is done, which not infrequently lasts until 10 o'clock -- after which the roast pig has to be devoured & coffee, or more commonly Sassafras tea --[4]

Corn huskings are similarly described as community affairs of mutual assistance in Pioneer Life in Kentucky. This description includes such points of similarity as the passing of the bottle, the captains' choosing of their teams, and the bounteous supper afterward.[5] Neither Drake nor the Shaker scribe refer to the kiss that may be claimed from the girl of his choice by the person finding a red ear of corn.[6] Such an opportunity likely would not be present in the Shaker group, but it was no doubt the most anticipated happening of the entire evening for the younger members of the assemblage in other communities.

---

[4] Ibid., p. 162.

[5] Drake, pp. 55-56.

[6] Daniel Lindsay Thomas and L. B. Thomas, Kentucky Superstitions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1920), p. 221. Also noted in the Gordon Wilson Folklore Collection, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

While corn shelling was a rainy-day occupation for the men on Kentucky farms and not usually made into a bee, the Shakers indicate that the shelling was another opportunity for group work.

> Corn Shelling -- Enfield Robinson & Co. had a corn shelling at the mill this evening -- H. L. Eades & company had one on the evening of the 27th.[7]

Taking the grain to country horse mills in the early years was discontinued in 1825 when the brethren constructed their own mill. The usual charge for grinding grain in the surrounding region was one-sixth of the total product. The Shakers, always anxious to give honest work at a reasonable rate, charged only one-eighth. "Going to the mill" was a social event as well as an economic necessity in the nineteenth century, and the relations between the Shakers and their neighbors were probably strengthened by this joint work.

When the fall harvest was well in hand, some of the Shakers worked again with the making of cloth. They dyed most of the material one of their standard colors, which were Drab, Snuff, Lead, and Brown. Many of the dyestuffs were gathered in the autumn from the woods, such as walnut hulls, hickory bark, maple bark, and sumac berries.

Brooms were made for their own use and for sale. Some of their brooms had heads which were round, as were the usual brooms made by the unskilled frontiersman. However, the Shakers developed a method of shaping them in a

---

[7] Shaker Record A, p. 297.

flat form, and this improvement was gradually adopted in all broom-making.[8] Broom corn and hickory saplings were used for brooms, brushes, and scrubs. The broom corn had to be planted away from the other fields so there would be no mixture and consequent detriment to the sorghum.[9]

Plaiting or braiding straw for hats and bonnets continued to be an all-season kind of pick-up work until 1838 when the society began using palmleaf for this purpose. Outside South Union, the use of straw continued on the farms for hats, bonnets, and mats.

Sweet potatoes were an important crop in Kentucky generally as well as at South Union. The brethren had "bees" to dig them in October. One resident of Bowling Green remembers her family's buying a kind of sweet potato called "Shaker Reds" from the colony in the early years of this century.[10]

Wild grapes were gathered for the making of wine. No distinction is made as to the kind used. In the surrounding area at that time could be found both fox grapes (big and blue) and small 'possum grapes.[11]

---

[8]Edward Deming Andrews, The Community Industries of the Shakers (Albany: The University of the State of New York), p. 132.

[9]Wilson Interview, March 25, 1968.

[10]Interview with Mrs. Clinton Rigsby, Bowling Green, Kentucky, March 28, 1968.

[11]Wilson Interview, March 25, 1968.

Some of the sisters are recorded as "scutching" flax in November, having previously helped with the spreading, lifting, and binding of it. By the winter months the material would be ready to weave into cloth.

As the fields were cleared of their yield, the brethren had time for maintenance and building again. Since they prepared most of the lumber, brick, shingles, nails and plaster to be used in the buildings, it took many years of work to complete them. The construction had to be done during times when the brethren could be spared from the fields. The blacksmith shop and wheelwright shop were both raised in November, 1816. If the type of work being done needed to be finished rapidly, the brethren worked late at night and on Sunday. Entries concerning the plastering of the New House pictured the men as

> Bending the Sabbath -- The plasterers continued their work in the New House today.[12]

> Industrious Plasterers -- worked on by candle light till about 8 o'clock. Such zeal and industry will live.[13]

After such long and arduous labors the plasterers felt the need of relaxation and, in the manner of Kentucky men in that day,

> They betook themselves to the forest and returned about sunset with three wild turkeys & a basket full of squirrels.[14]

---

[12] Shaker Record A, p. 370.

[13] Ibid., p. 371a.

[14] Ibid.

Other excursions for recreational purposes were interwoven with their autumnal chores. Boys gathered paw paws (sometimes called "custard apples") for custards and desserts. After the railroad was built, some of the picnics and outings were made on "the cars." An unusually long trip was made to Nashville in 1859 and the scribe wrote that they

> Returned the same evening or rather night -- having paid dearly enough for "their whistle."[15]

This particular scribe had grown up in the South Union colony but shows from time to time his familiarity with various literary works, here referring perhaps to advice given by Benjamin Franklin.[16]

Nuttings were occasions for other fall outings -- for hickory nuts, hazelnuts, and chestnuts. Some mishaps occurred, since these outings attracted the old as well as the young.

> Old Mills Price lost in the woods -- hazelnut hunting -- not found till next day.[17]

---

[15] Shaker Record B, p. 215.

[16] Benjamin Franklin, "The Whistle," in American Heritage, ed. Leon Howard, Louis B. Wright, Carl Bode (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1955), p. 196.

[17] Shaker Record A, p. 127.

CHAPTER IV

Winter

In the long days of winter the everyday events of the Shaker colony largely paralleled those of their neighbors. Activities were limited because of the weather but certain routine work needed attention inside and out of the warm buildings.

A sugar camp was put in operation at the out-farm of Black Lick in January, 1813. Maple sugar making was common during that time with the words "sugar camp" designating the grove or site of the operation. Many place names in Kentucky today reflect the sugar-making days: Sugar Camp Hollow, Maple Springs, Sugar Sink and Mapleville. Daniel Drake recalls sugar making in his youth:

> There were but few trees on father's land, and he rented a "camp," as the grove was called, about two miles off. Our tapping was with the axe. The troughs were rudely dug out with the same tool & generally of Buckeye, as being a soft wood which moreover was not apt to crack during the summer. One or two iron kettles, with the old iron pot, were swung over a log fire, before which was a kind of half faced camp covered with clapboards, as a shelter from the rain. While father did the wood chopping and kept up the fires, it was my province to drive "old grey" with an open barrel on a sled, turning and winding through the woods, to collect the sugar water. . . . We took milk along, and made spicewood tea with the syrup.[1]

---

[1] Drake, pp. 86-87.

Maple molasses was made by the early settlers, and the Shakers record this also:

> Molasses Making -- T. J. Shannon took Magy Naylor & Volumnia Miller to Black Lick to Sugar Camp. P. Johns already there.[2]

The prevalence of molasses mills to the end of the nineteenth century can be noted in many writings. One of the incidents of the Hargis-Cockrill feud took place at a molasses mill where Tige Hargis was ambushed and murdered.[3] Sorghum cane was also used for molasses. In 1857 the Shakers introduced a Chinese sugar cane called "Sorgho" in an effort to obtain molasses better and cheaper than that got from the Louisiana cane.[4] The surrounding farmers also tried this new cane. In fact, a sugar industry was attempted, with a central community called Sorgho in Daviess County. The community remains but the sugar making has long since been discontinued.[5]

Most of the established homesteads in Kentucky during the nineteenth century boasted an ice house. During each winter there would be several freezes in which they could cut and haul ice in for storage. Despite the severe cold at the time the hauling needed to be done, the Shakers were

---

[2] Shaker Record A, p. 438.

[3] Thomas Clark, Kentucky, Land of Contrast (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), p. 210.

[4] Shaker Record B, p. 204.

[5] Wilson Interview, March 25, 1968.

pleased to be able to fill their house with ice. It was cut when two inches thick or thicker. One January was particularly fruitful:

> More Ice Getting -- Mer this morning 8° below zero -- The best Ice is being hauled in to the West family today, that I have ever seen here in many years it is clear solid & about 6 inches thick -- The ground is still covered with Snow 2 inches deep -- Weather seems to be moderating a trifle --[6]

Chopping wood was a winter chore always waiting for the tireless brethren. During the cold months the greedy fireplaces, cooking hearths, and stoves consumed wood in mammoth proportions. Many man-hours had to be devoted to getting in the wood. Some of the Shaker brethren would go to the out-farms on "chopping frolicks." At other times the wood was brought in and chopped at South Union. One record gives details of a three-day session of wood chopping in the door yard.[7] Rail-making was also accomplished during this season. In 1817 the brethren finished 10,000 rails from January 14 to March 1.[8] Drake describes this as "mauling rails." He stated that he was able at fourteen years of age to cut and split seventy-five green blue-ash rails or fifty of honey locust in a day. He counseled

---

[6] Shaker Record D, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, p. 7.

[7] Shaker Record A, p. 406.

[8] Ibid., p. 166.

patience in the beginning and cited gentle taps as necessary to get the blow well entered in the log. He recommended in a letter to his son that more enterprises of human life might benefit from gentle taps and patience in the beginning.[9]

There are several instances in the journals where sleighing is mentioned. In 1835 the scribe noted that the ministry went and returned from Water Vliet in a sleigh made of bent hickory poles. Used in the Shaker village for their utility, sleighs were the basis for winter parties in other parts of the state.[10]

The plain and simple furniture for which the Shakers are noted was made largely during the long months of winter. The South Union colony did not make furniture for sale as did some of the other Shaker societies. They did make most of the furniture needed for their living and working quarters. They chose New Year's Day to begin some furniture making in 1849.

> Chairs for the Dining Table -- Brethren on this blessed New Years day began to make chairs for the dining room & so get clear of benches.[11]

Since the Shaker furniture was entirely without ornament, moldings, and inlays, it compared with the simple farm-made pieces made by the regional craftsmen. As the Kentucky households became more sophisticated and imported fine

---

[9]Drake, p. 70.

[10]Davenport, p. 27.

[11]Shaker Record B, p. 137.

furniture from the East, the differences between that and the Shaker furniture became more marked.

Shoes were made in their shoe shop with their own leather, and one of the Shaker brethren learned to bind books. Though likely not as skilled as the Shakers, the head of the household in pioneer Kentucky was usually a fair cobbler. Book binding was not an art normally found on the farms.

Taking into account the many kinds of household, farm and community endeavors carried on by the Shakers, it is plain that there was quality in administration and in individual workmanship. The scheduling of the work, always a mark of the careful husbandman, was much more complicated in this group farming because of the size of the crops, the size of the colony and the wide variety of activities. This detailed planning showed that the farmers and craftsmen drawn into this communal society must have included some of the most prudent and foresighted of the pioneers. True, there were a few "Winter Shakers" or those ne'er-do-wells who took advantage of the warm winter quarters and secure life during the cold months. These persons, however, were exceptions and not characteristic of the ordinarily conscientious Shaker. The winter life of the village is summed up in this entry:

> Business -- Work in the different branches seems going on well with the force we have -- One company of Sisters putting up Seeds, Another making bonnets -- Another spinning silk -- Another weaving -- Another ironing, another cooking -- another hat making -- Brn at their usual avocations -- Carpentering, shoe-making, stock feeding, getting in logs and firewood.[12]

---

[12] Ibid., p. 315.

CHAPTER V

Traditional Patterns of Speech

The person responsible for writing the daily notes at South Union in a continuous journal form was Harvey Eades, who was the colony's principal scribe. In the 1870's he put together the cumulative records of the colony from 1805 up to that time. Eades was brought as an infant to South Union when his parents joined before he was one year old. His parents were from Warren County, Kentucky.[1] Because his entire life was lived among the Western Shakers, one may assume that his writings would reflect the folk speech of the area around the village, the area from whence most of the colony's members had come. Kentucky has long been recognized as being a region rich in traditional and distinctive patterns of speech. In the journals can be noted words and expressions that have been found in Kentucky speech since the settling of the region, and which obviously have earlier origins. Interwoven in the daily language are biblical allusions and references.

---

[1]Julia Neal, By Their Fruits (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 235.

In Kentucky speech "tolerable" and "tolerably" have long meant "fairly well" in regard to a person's health, and "rather" or "fairly" in modifying an adjective.[2]

> Backsliding -- William O. Winston. Shame! can't or will not let whisky nor girls alone. Today scampered off with a tolerably respectable young woman -- Molly Barnet.[3]

Another backslider was Ruth Edie, and "Eli took her and her plunder to one of our near neighbors."[4] This word was used in the 1800's in the region to mean "baggage," "personal effects" or "household goods." During cleaning time the sisters "continued to red up and scratch out the dirt." Sometimes this is found as redd up.[5]

---

[2]Shaker Record A, p. 356. See also Harold Wentworth, American Dialect Dictionary (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1944), p. 650. Cited hereafter as ADD.

[3]Ibid., p. 371a. See also Sir James A. H. Murray, Oxford English Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 1888-1933), XI, 112. Cited hereafter as OED.

[4]Shaker Record B, p. 33. See also Mitford McLeod Mathews, Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 1266. Cited hereafter as DA.

[5]Nancy E. Moore, The Journal of Eldress Nancy, ed. Mary Julia Neal (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1963), p. 206. See also The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, ed. Newman Ivey White (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1952), p. 583. Cited hereafter as BC.

An early English flavor is prominent in some of the entries. "Solomon & Jesse Rankin began to cut down & stook up their corn for the cows."[6] In another instance, they stooked the wheat.[7] "Matthew McCarver a turn off from Pleasant Hill hove up here today."[8] This past tense of heave can still be heard in parts of Kentucky. An early form of instantly is recorded, "It was pulled down instanter before his face."[9] In the spring the brethren and sisters cleared the brush from "the Know."[10] "We planted 5 trees of Cedar. . . high on the East of the Necessaries." This term meaning outdoor toilet was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[11]

The leave-taking of some of the members is familiarly described, "Wormed out -- Lucinda Smith and Sidney Smith leave good riddance."[12] Being in trouble put a person "in a Bad Box"[13] or "in a bad fix."[14] The Shaker passion for

---

[6] Shaker Record A, p. 356. See also OED, X, 1018.

[7] Shaker Record B, p. 99.

[8] Shaker Record A, p. 260. See also OED, V, 426.

[9] Ibid., p. 327. See also OED, V, 350.

[10] Shaker Record B, p. 218.

[11] Shaker Record C, p. 302. See also E. Cobham Brewer, Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 636. Cited hereafter as BD.

[12] Shaker Record A, p. 322. See also OED, p. 30.

[13] Moore, p. 46. See also DA, p. 621.

[14] Shaker Record A, pp. 113, 136.

cleanliness is well known and the condition pictured here could have been an exaggeration:

> Cleaning Up -- The Eastern Deacons came on us unawares & caught us in the dirt, So we hide them away until we clean up a little.[15]

After describing a trip taken by the sisters and brethren to Russellville, the scribe wrote that "they all appear to be well pleased with their little broad."[16] This might seem to be an elaborate description of a journey of only twelve miles, but any outing was an occasion for some excitement. When visitors came to South Union, the scribe wrote, "We went over to the office to notice them some."[17]

Vegetables enough for a meal were a mess of beans or corn, while the brethren and sisters once gathered a "fine chance of berries."[18] Nearby Allen County natives still reap good chances of berries and fruit, and describe them in this way.[19] The South Union Shakers had a reputation for their fine food and hospitality. But at times their kindness was strained: "Pestiferous -- 24 more persons here from the country for dinner."[20]

---

[15] Ibid., p. 439. See also OED, III, 395.

[16] Shaker Journal 1871-1872, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, p. 45. See also DA, p. 190.

[17] Moore, p. 85. See also BC, p. 570.

[18] Ibid., p. 141.

[19] Interview with Mrs. John Meredith, June 20, 1967.

[20] Shaker Record B, p. 269. See also Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language. International Edition. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1958), p. 944.

During the Civil War many soldiers received hospitality at the village. Officers were served apart from the men. "Three of the big Bugs ate supper had lodging and breakfast at the office."[21]

The word pregnant was not found in the journals, although babies were born at the colony or conceived by the members. Several expressions indicated this condition:

> Going -- Ellen Hall leaves this morning -- Says she finds herself in the way of increase.[22]

> All the women & children at Black Lick moved today to S. U. & were located at the Black Family viz: Rachel Ryan . . . & next Thursday Polly Shirley & her baby on increase![23]

> Admitted -- East Family Harriet Crock alias Warren with her little daughter Frances and in fair way for another soon was admitted today.[24]

A recognition of what had happened with no noticeable reproof can be seen in an entry recording a birth:

> Baby Born. Polly M. Whyte Isaac's wife. slip gap, nam'd Samuel.[25]

---

[21] Moore, p. 101. See also BC, p. 520.

[22] Shaker Record D, p. 251. See also OED, V, 182.

[23] Shaker Record A, p. 198.

[24] Ibid., p. 427. See also BD, p. 345.

[25] Ibid., p. 124.

In a fair way is used again to mean "almost sure to be" or "in that direction." When Elder Benjamin had had an accident and was recuperating at a farmer's home near the site of the mishap, the scribe wrote that he "seems in a fair way to recover soon."[26]

Widows seemed to leave the village with regularity, and with escorts:

> To the World -- Anne Taylor leaves taking her two children. Also Columbus Knowles goes with her. He just at the green age to be a fool.[27]

> Worse Still -- Benjamin Goodhope . . . went off with Polly Armstrong Whyte. . . & married. Poor Ben. He fled from his persecutors in Ohio -- To be caught napping in Kentucky![28]

The following entry shows the Shakers were familiar with the humorous and exaggerated boasts of the early settlers and the traditional rejoinder designed to take the braggart down a peg or two.

> Backsliding -- John Small and Sarah Fisher, leaves to hunt a cabin in the woods. John says he wants to get into a cabin so he can throw the cobs of his roasting ears thro the crack in the wall & have no one to request him to clean them up. But get the ears first John -- they won't come without work.[29]

---

[26] Shaker Record A, p. 354. See also BD, p. 345.

[27] Ibid., p. 439. See also BD, p. 416.

[28] Ibid., p. 351. See also BD, p. 184.

[29] Ibid., p. 401. Boast of throwing the cobs through the cracks in the cabin familiar to Gordon Wilson. Cf. "get the ears first" with BD, p. 183.

Gordon Wilson has written of "seeing the elephant" meaning the witnessing of an unusual sight or event. The Shaker journals evidence the use of this term in the same sense, here meaning their own village.

> A few soldiers who are going home, came to see "the Elephant" before leaving, & strutted over the premises. Said if it was Sabbath, they must see Shakertown before leaving.[30]

The writings of the Shakers show a variety of allusions to the Bible. Outsiders are called Gentiles -- "Gentiles like locusts on hand yesterday."[31] Defecting Shakers were aptly described:

> This morning James Buchanan Eliza Broadbent and his sister Lucretia took their leave of this place to enjoy the fruits of Babylon for a season.[32]

On occasion the Shakers would go on proselytizing trips. Brother Field went to Chicago "thinking there were a number there ready for the sickle -- I fear the grain is not ripe."[33] Jo Dunn left the village again "fixing for his trinity, world, flesh and devil."[34]

---

[30] Shaker Record C, p. 22. See also Gordon Wilson, Tidbits of Kentucky Folklore, No. 1703, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky; and Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting, Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 119. Cited hereafter as DAPPP.

[31] Shaker Record B, p. 323.

[32] Moore, p. 225.

[33] Shaker Record D, p. 94.

The cold plague of 1814-1815 left the village in a somber mood, expressed in biblical terms:

> Meeting heavy -- harps mostly hung on the willows -- sadness & distress on account of the great sickness.[35]

Young widows were often problems in the community. After Fanny Youngs left, the scribe poses the question, "Had we not better take Paul's advice & not receive young widows?"[36] On Eades' seventy-fifth birthday, he laments, "Swifter than a weavers shuttle time flyeth."[37]

In a typical farewell poem, composed by Elder Benjamin Youngs, he leaves his blessings:

> South Union Bless you, I do say,
> In "Basket & in Store"
> May heavens blessing be your stay
> Now, hence, forevermore.[38]

Some of the soldiers during the Civil War decided to go home and the scribe wrote they "had gotten the scales off their eyes."[39] A less than orderly session was recorded as "a

---

[35] Ibid., p. 149. See also Ps. 137:2. Here the Jews describe their sadness and tell why they cannot sing.

[36] Shaker Record A, p. 428. See also Tim. 5:9. Paul counseled his people to take in no widows under sixty years of age. Younger widows, he said, were proven to be idle, tattlers, busybodies. . . and they ought to remarry.

[37] Shaker Record D, p. 51. See also Job 7:6.

[38] Shaker Record B, preface, no page number. See also Deut. 28:5.

[39] Moore, p. 4. See also Acts 9:18.

babel of a meeting."[40] Two brothers leaving Shakerdom were insulted in biblical language:

> Austin Choat & his brother Isaac Choat -- both went today -- to hunt up old quarters & find the pit from which they were digged.[41]

The South Union Shakers spoke frequently of money as the one thing needful,[42] and they considered economic success very important.

> It is through a peculiar twist in Shaker thought that Christ's expression used in commending Mary's desire for spiritual things as opposed to Martha's concern for the welfare of their guest should be thus applied to the gain of material things. Yet the Shakers believed so firmly in economic success that "the one thing needful" came to represent, not the spiritual virtues, but money.[43]

A biblical name for the hereafter is given in an observation concerning a close escape:

> Had they not been warned by a faithful contraband, doubtless the cars would have been dashed to pieces; & many of the soldiers sent to their long homes.[44]

---

[40] Shaker Record A, p. 34. See also Gen. 11:9.

[41] Ibid., p. 292. See also Ps. 40:2, and Eccles. 10:8.

[42] Moore, p. 190. See also Luke 10:42.

[43] Neal, p. 177. Cf. "the one compulsory thing" in Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk Literature (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1955), C650. Cited hereafter as Motif-Index.

[44] Moore, p. 67. See also Eccles. 12:5.

The courts in Kentucky were not sympathetic to the Shakers in regard to family differences. The Shakers felt strongly about what they considered to be injustice by the courts.

> Another display of the Dragons power. An unconstitutional law was passed by the Kentucky Legislature to day -- whereby -- a divorce is allowable by one of a party joining the Shakers & the party not joining obtains all the property & children of the family! Oh! Kentucky! Noble Kentucky! How art thou fallen![45]

Some of the expressions used in the journals reflect aspects of the farm life. On the readmittance of one Viney Shackelford, the scribe remembered that before she left she had declared that she "would burn in hell to a crackelen" before she would ever return.[46] Other phrases containing farm terms, while not found in recognized sources, are clearly in the pattern of the speech of the times and interesting for their graphic descriptions. One scribe was concerned about two brethren who were away from the village and she said that she had rather "see them home now than a dozen blind horses."[47] Jason Streeby came to the colony and wanted to join since "he wants to be saved from Still House tea."[48]

---

[45] Shaker Record A, p. 91. See also Rev. 20:2, and II Sam. 1:19.

[46] Ibid., p. 296. See also DAPPP, p. 83.

[47] Moore, p. 63.

[48] Shaker Record D, p. 50. A place name in the Mammoth Cave National Park is Stillhouse Hollow -- Gordon Wilson Collection.

Eternity is described in a term most pleasant to a farming group. "Demise -- Brother John Merrifield went to the summer-land today."[49] James Paige, labeled a backslider, envisions a different kind of demise:

> . . . he would be willing to be burned up in a log heap, if that would bring him Salvation but to get it in this slow way, he'll be d----d if he can stand it, -- So goes off with himself.[50]

Gone fawn skin was used to mean "hopeless" or "used up," or "done for." Gone goose or gone gosling can both be heard in rural Kentucky today in this same sense.

> Snow 3 inches deep -- just barely saved the cabbage - Were they now exposed they would be a gone fawn skin.[51]

> Sent to Her Mother -- Melvina Pritchard -- went with her Uncle . . . to see her mother who is said to be sick in Bow. Green -- "gone fawn skin."[52]

Puns are of unascertainable origin but the term has been used to mean a play on words since 1660.[53] Though not in the elegant tradition of earlier years, the following entries show a wry humor along with native wit:

> Readmitted Philip Wheat now we'll see whether it is wheat or chaff. turned cut chaff.[54]

---

[49] Shaker Record C, p. 23.

[50] Shaker Record A, p. 259.

[51] Ibid., p. 428.

[52] Shaker Record C, p. 96. See also DAPPP, p. 128.

[53] OED, VIII, 1504.

[54] Shaker Record D, p. 155.

Preaching tour -- Eld. J. R. Eades . . . start for Duck Creek, Tennessee . . . on a preaching expedition -- Rather a Duck Chase for these times.[55]

Backsliding -- Dunn Davis -- having repeatedly visited the still with overmuch within -- left today -- & went to Proctors. The last of Dunn. Dunn has done it.[56]

Marcia Small and Nudge Nudged off together.[57]

---

[55] Shaker Record B, p. 115.

[56] Shaker Record A, p. 275-276.

[57] Ibid., p. 260.

CHAPTER VI

Beliefs and Customs

The Shakers at South Union exhibited a familiarity with common beliefs concerning the relationship between the actions of birds and animals and the weather. They always recorded the arrival of the martins and usually following this note would be a declaration that "Spring is here."[1] In Grayson County there is still the common saying that "When the martin comes, spring is not far off."[2] The heralding of spring is also interpreted from the early cooing of doves.[3] Cranes were harbingers, too:

> The trumpet-throated cranes now fly north to the Lakes -- indicating that winter is past.[4]

And the whipporwills were heard:

> Whipporwills -- Sing this morning -- spring is here at last.[5]

---

[1] Shaker Record A, p. 332.

[2] Elza E. Pentress, "Superstitions of Grayson County" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, Western Kentucky State College, 1934), p. 13.

[3] Shaker Record C, p. 255.

[4] Ibid., p. 310.

[5] Shaker Record A, p. 349.

But, alas, one week later:

> Snow, Mer. 27 -- Whipporwills music frozen up.[6]

In the fall came other signs of forthcoming weather. The cranes gave the Shakers a message:

> Cranes -- Several flocks of the large Sandhill cranes are passing over going to their Southern winter quarters -- this betokens winters approach -- Snow is now said to cover the ground about the lakes.[7]

A similar belief was collected in this century in Grayson and Edmonson counties:

> A flock of wild geese or wild ducks flying south is a sure indication of cold weather.[8]

The Shakers noted that the severity of the winter had been predicted by signs from nature:

> The old trappers last fall predicted this would be a severe winter -- their sign was that the Musk Rats & Beaver had doubled the thickness of the walls of their houses.[9]

In Grayson County, the winter temperatures were indicated by the wild geese:

> If wild geese fly low in the winter when they go south, the winter will be mild.
>
> If wild geese fly high when they go south, the winter will be severe.[10]

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Shaker Record C, p. 108.

[8] Fentress, p. 10. Also see Gordon Wilson Collection.

[9] Shaker Record B, p. 308.

[10] Fentress, p. 10.

Frogs were also viewed as being weather forecasters, and rain was sure to follow their warnings:

> Just before dinner the rain frogs began hollowing and in less than an hour the thunders began to mutter and by one o'clock P.M. it began to rain.[11]

On another occasion the frogs predicted showers:

> . . . there was hardly a cloud to be seen when a little rain or tree frog set up its little warning of an other shower of rain. & sure enough by three o'clock P.M. the clouds had gathered & the rain began to descend.[12]

This belief is still prevalent in Kentucky.[13]

Agricultural societies, to whom the weather is of great importance, seem to be especially aware of natural phenomena. Noted in the Shaker journals are instances of shooting stars, meteors, comets and eclipses of the sun. The daily temperature was given along with further comment on days with extreme temperatures. Hail was described in several entries as being the size of quail's eggs and hen's eggs. This description of a March hailstorm might be looked upon as a "tall tale" had one other than Eldress Nancy Moore reported it:

> This afternoon we had a very hard rain and an uncommon hail storm which broke a good many pains of glass. some of the hail stones were almost the size of pullets egg. They cut the green foilage of the pine and cedar trees, and broke the wings of some of the birds and one of the brethren who was holding his horses in the field saw a little Rabbit knocked down apparently dead by the hail. --[14]

---

[11] Moore, p. 150.

[12] Ibid., p. 152.

[13] Pentress, p. 6. Thomas, p. 203.

[14] Moore, p. 122.

The Shakers did not believe every wise saying about the weather:

> The old saying that fruit is never killed in March proves false this time. Again it is often said that fruit is seldom killed in the dark of the moon which is also a failure at this time.[15]

Similar views can be found in Pioneer Life in Kentucky and in Kentucky Superstitions.

> A belief in the influence of the moon . . . on vegetation and even on animal life, was common. Thus radishes must be planted at the decrease of the moon for they tapered downwards and so of some other vegetables. Others still, must be planted or sowed in the increase of that orb. And hogs must not be killed in the dark or decrease of that luminary for the pork would shrink and waste away in the barrel.[16]

The first appearance of the seventeen-year locusts was reported in the journal in 1821. ". . . locusts make the welkin ring with their eternal song -- Pharaoh".[17] In 1872, Elder Eades muses about these visits:

> I have seen them appear 4 times, first in 1821 -- 2nd 1838. 3rd 1855, and 4th 1872 -- precisely 17 years apart each time -- this is a mysterious phoenomenon -- who can account for it?[18]

Some of the journal notations show traditional attitudes toward the supernatural and dream visions with prophetic meanings. The actions of one of the southern

---

[15] Shaker Journal 1871-1872, p. 11. See also Thomas, p. 177.

[16] Drake, p. 204. Thomas, p. 175.

[17] Shaker Record A, p. 210.

[18] Shaker Record C, p. 225.

soldiers during the Civil War is described and a consequent "judgment" is assumed.

> One of the soldiers hauled down the United States flag, and not satisfied with tearing it down, he must trample it under his feet while on the roof. While in this act he fell down from the roof and broke both his legs. He died in a few days and no doubt received the reward of his works.[19]

At times the journal records reflect sadness at the death of some of the beloved elders and express the prayerful hope that young leaders would come along who could inspire their people as had these older brethren.

> Oh! that the young and rising generation would take a deep sense of it and let their mantle of simple obedience to the order and gift of God rest upon them. So they may step forward and fill the ranks and be an honor to their calling.[20]

The same sentiment is expressed on another day:

> The scene is affecting when we consider how fast our good ancients of the place are passing away from our sight and who will come up to the help of the Lord and fill the place of those who are here no more in time.[21]

The belief that a dog or horse barking or snorting tells of strangers or robbers nearby is illustrated by the journal account of the night Elder Lorenzo was sleeping at

---

[19] Moore, p. 9. See also Motif-Index Q210, or Motif-Index Q395.

[20] Ibid., p. 114.

[21] Ibid., p. 157.

the clothier's shop.[22] The dog he kept with him began to growl and become extremely restless. Elder Lorenzo could not pacify it and finally put the dog out. As he drove the dog out, he spied the two robbers outside who had evidently been the cause of the dog's uneasiness.[23] A Grayson County belief is that if a horse snorts at night, a stranger is near.[24]

Brother Urban was told in a dream that there were robbers about[25] but he could neither see nor hear anything amiss when he awoke and looked about. However, the next morning the brethren discovered there had been robbers at the horse and ox stables.[26] Credence was given to a dream of one of the sisters that foretold the death two weeks away of one of the then healthy brethren.[27] His death and the details of the funeral happened as she had dreamed it, so the journal stated.[28] One journalist foretold his early demise:

> My age -- I am 22 years old today, not many years allotted me! M.H.R.[29]

This entry was made in 1829 and Milton Robinson died in 1831.

---

[22] Motif-Index B134.3 or Motif-Index D1812.5.0.9. See also Thomas, p. 249.

[23] Moore, p. 177.

[24] Fentress, p. 45. See also Thomas, p. 253.

[25] Motif-Index D1810.82.

[26] Moore, p. 109.

[27] Motif-Index D1812.33.

[28] Moore, p. 120.

[29] Shaker Record A, p. 318.

The well known lucky number of three is mentioned several times in the journals. Once it concerned a weak believer:

> Readmitted Wm. Martin -- 1st time at Union Village -- 2nd time at Pleasant Hill & 3rd time at S. U. Now Wm. let the "3rd time be the charm."[30]

The popular custom of stump speaking was also recorded by the Shakers, however with no political implications.

> Finished Shearing the Sheep -- & by a bargain with the shearers for a stump speech H. L. Eades agreed to speak one hour at the close -- So Eld. Benj. says, "Hervey stump spoke it."[31]

However, upon reflection, Elder Benjamin must have decided against such a worldly pastime as this, since the next Sunday "Stump speaking was forbidden in meeting by Eld. B."[32]

Two widely held ideas about not beginning work on Friday that couldn't be finished that week and the good luck that accompanies picking up a pin, are reflected in the Shaker rules:

> Father Joseph always taught Believers not to raise buildings, or commence heavy jobs on Friday or the latter part of the week.[33]

> No one should carelessly pass over small things, as a pin, a kernel of grain, etc. thinking it too small to pick up, for if we do, our Heavenly Father will consider us too small for him to bestow his blessing on.[34]

---

[30] Shaker Record A, p. 216.

[31] Ibid., p. 349.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Edward Deming Andrews, The People Called Shakers (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p. 288. See also Thomas, p. 211, and Gordon Wilson Collection.

[34] Andrews, p. 287. See also Thomas, p. 161.

The Christmas season was marked only by a "Union Meeting" with no evidence of personal gifts or special foods. Once the scribe noted a remembrance from afar:

> Christmas. . . . received a love token from our friends at New Lebanon & Harvard -- consisting of Lozenges & Cloves.[35]

However, at that time the day was apparently not a time of much celebration in the surrounding area, as a Barren County writer remembers:

> Christmas wasn't celebrated when I was a boy as it is now. . . . The first Christmas tree I ever saw was about 1853. . . . The only Christmas that we had was that my mother made us some ginger cakes, cut in fancy shapes: and sometimes there was a stick of candy for each of us. And on that day we went rabbit hunting![36]

---

[35] Shaker Record A, p. 436.

[36] Edwards, p. 334.

CHAPTER VII

Ailments and Treatments

It may be assumed that the members of this well-regulated, temperate, and active colony could have been healthier than their counterparts in the outside world. There have been efforts to claim and support a longevity among Shakers greater than is ordinary.[1] However, like others, they were subject to disease and illness and their attitudes toward and treatment of these diseases reflect ideas prevailing among rural Kentuckians of their time.

Only a few times does a journal indicate that a number of people were sick at the same time. During the "Cold Plague" of 1814-1815 the journals record that about one hundred persons in the community were affected and twenty-two died over the two-year period. The Asiatic Cholera epidemic of 1835 raged on the outside of the colony, but they had only thirty cases of sickness and no deaths. The scribe quotes a Bowling Green newspaper which stated that one-fortieth of the population of the neighboring town of Russellville had died of cholera. The Shakers took

---

[1]Andrews, People Called Shakers, p. 197.

in many outsiders and nursed them. Twenty-four coffins were made for their neighbors by the brethren at this time.[2]

In 1843 the records show that the colony had twenty to thirty cases of "typhoid pneumonia" or "sinking fever" during the month of March.[3] There were seven deaths among the children from "spotted fever" in 1868.[4] Bloody flux (a type of diarrhea) was listed as "prevailing at this time" in 1826.[5] Several cases of smallpox were listed in 1865.[6] The term "fever" was coupled with various other words to describe afflictions -- "chills and fever," "Rheumatic Billious fever," "congestive fever" and "nervous fever." In 1873 so many were suffering "with what is thought to be the horse distemper Epizootic" that the regular meeting was canceled.[7]

Most of the entries which describe illnesses list only one person and his particular ailment. Sometimes the scribe also tells how the patient is being "doctored." A boy was taken to Sulphur Springs to be cured of "scald head."[8] One case each was reported of "disease of the spleen," "consumption," "congestion of the brain," "cramp colic," jaundice, vertigo and a "cancerous humor."

---

[2] Shaker Record A, p. 425.

[3] Shaker Record B, p. 78.

[4] Shaker Record C, p. 126.

[5] Shaker Record A, p. 277.

[6] Shaker Record C, p. 11.

[7] Ibid., p. 241.

[8] Shaker Record A, p. 114.

One of the brethren who died of an enlargement of the liver left instructions with the ministry to have an autopsy performed.

> He desired to have his body opened -- that we might see if any thing could be learned or information gained by the operation.[9]

Some of the treatments called for bleeding, a common practice throughout the region, and generous doses of calomel. Calomel was given for consumption, eye trouble, chills and fever, and to promote bowel regularity. Not everyone believed in the efficacy of these remedies, as can be noted by this double journal entry:

> July 7, 1828 . . . . I now begin to take Calomel to try to improve my health which seems failing.
> M. H. Robinson
> Cousin, you have more faith in Calomel than I have.
> H.L.E.[10]

> July 10, 1828 -- Today Dr. Foster recommended me to take syrup for my lungs.
>
> Poor Milton has the consumption & know it not
> But he has fitted his few earthly days well.
> H. L. Eades[11]

---

[9] Shaker Record B, p. 185.

[10] Shaker Record A, p. 308.

[11] Ibid. M. H. Robinson wrote the original journal entries which appear on the dates of July 7 and July 10. Later, H. L. Eades added the comments which follow each of these two entries.

A Kentucky minister discusses his experiences with bleeding and calomel:

> A small boy, about ten years old was taken with a severe chill; he was put to bed and two physicians, the best known in that part of the country, were summoned. They bled him freely, and the marks of the lance can be shown on his arms today; he was given calomel, wrapped up and kept warm. And from the time he was taken sick, the latter part of February, till he began to recover, the first of June, he had not one drink of cool water, nor was he thoroughly bathed. He became a living skeleton, and had it not been, seemingly, for a special providence, he would not be worrying you with this foolishness.[12]

Many of the medicinal herbs used by the Shakers were raised in their gardens, as were those of their neighbors in the region -- "tansy, feverfew, thyme, marjoram, marigold, sage, foxglove."[13] In Old Kentucky Cook writes about mixtures of herbs and other ingredients:

> The remedies were nearly always mixed in some way with honey and whiskey. But the bitter stuff, such as tansy, mixed with whiskey, which was forced on the children for worms, turned so many people against it that they could never use it afterward.[14]

Not all the herbs needed were grown in the gardens, however. Many were picked or dug in the forest.

> Our Doctor -- John Constant Calloway out hunting medicinal roots today.[15]

---

[12] Cook, p. 133.

[13] Piercy, p. 140.

[14] Cook, p. 132.

[15] Shaker Record A, p. 339.

The society's doctor, as most doctors of his day, needed few medicines that he could not obtain from nature.

> The doctor carried his drug store in his saddlebags, and compounded and put up his own prescriptions.[16]

In other journal entries, the scribe writes that a group went to "Stokes old field" to gather lobelia,[17] and others visited "Widow Shaws for hoarhound."[18] "Ginger stew" was used as a preventive after some of the sisters were wet by a rain.[19] Mullein was available within the village and this plant has had many uses. According to several writers, mullein will cure a multitude of ills.

> Mullein tea will cure bronchitus, croup, or colds.[20]
>
> To cure a sore throat . . . crumble some dry mullein leaves and smoke a cigarette made from them.[21]
>
> A drink made from mullein will cure affected kidneys.[22]
>
> Mullein leaves should be bound to the outside of the throat for quinsy.[23]

---

[16] Cook, p. 241.

[17] Shaker Record B, p. 121.

[18] Ibid., p. 97.

[19] Shaker Record A, p. 443.

[20] Fentress, p. 69.

[21] Ibid., p. 70.

[22] Thomas, p. 108. Fentress, p. 82.

[23] Mary Louise Washington, "The Folklore of the Cumberlands as Reflected in the Writings of Jesse Stuart" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Folklore, University of Pennsylvania, 1960), p. 388.

Various medications were given for the bite of an unidentified kind of spider in 1815.

> Spider Bite! Andrew Barnett, while rising was bitten by a spider -- & soon life despaired of -- A great many things done -- given Black Snake root -- Plantain -- sweet oil clysters warm bathes -- drafts of raw onions to his next night spirits of Hartshorn -- did not get about until the nex 3rd day & entirely well for over 2 weeks.

The copier added his views. The above entry was in 1815, and the copying of the early journal was done in 1870.

> Note the spirits of Hartshorn perhaps was the only thing that did any good. In a precisely similar case, I gave the patient nearly a half gill of Hartshorn & brandy mixed and tho previously screaming with pain, was relieved in 5 hours & well as common next day. H. L. Eades[23]

For burns the Shakers used carbolic acid in solution to wash the burns, then in a few days changed the dressing and applied a salve of mutton suet, castor oil, and carbolic acid.[24]

In the journal of 1871-72, the scribe wrote of one member who had doctored himself some thirty years before and had never been sick since.

> . . . he had worked at the tanners trade and often very hard. When overworked he would take a chill & then would feel compelled to take medicines, peruvian bark mostly which was king cure-all in that day.
>
> He finally became weary and disgusted with that way of living and he resolved to try another method. . . . he would rise early and take the cold bath evry morning and then stir round & get up a good circulation.[25]

---

[23] Shaker Record A, p. 150.

[24] Shaker Journal 1871-1872, p. 33.

[25] Ibid., p. 41.

South Union had its share of accidents, particularly among the younger boys who showed adventurous spirits even within this staid community. The elder who was keeping the journal at that time showed little patience with them:

> Casualty -- Robert Johns got his leg broken, while trying to tread the spokes of a wagon while in motion -- fool![26]

> Casualty -- Barzille Beard got his arm broken by riding a horse without a bridle -- go ahead boys![27]

> Robt. Johns, going about on crutches, & Barzille Beard with his arm in a sling -- paid dearly for their folly.[28]

The Shakers had a very understanding attitude toward a member of the colony who had a particular kind of affliction.

> Br. Nathaniel Rankin and William Rice went to Mill Point to cut & saw timber & procure lumber for a house for Genny Neely . . . which was done as she was nervously disposed -- & was thence annoying and easily annoyed but in no criminal manner -- Her affliction being entirely out of her control.[29]

The Shakers used an electrostatic machine for treatment of various fevers.

> Eldress Betsy is very sick with an inflamatory fever of an eruptive character . . . . Br. John Cooper has kindly undertaken her treatment. He recommends sweating and elecrifying every day untill the fever is subdued -- Diet light -- never more than twice a day.[30]

---

[26] Shaker Record A, p. 106.

[27] Ibid., p. 107.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p. 226.

[30] Shaker Journal 1871-1872, p. 15.

In the second half of the century there are notations in the journals concerning the visits to the village of doctors and dentists from the nearby towns. Individuals were taken to particular places in Kentucky and Tennessee for treatment for the more complicated cases. Bowling Green was the town most often listed.

> El. Br. S. Shannon went with Eli to see Dr. Atchison of Bowling Green -- who pronounced him incurable -- He carefully examined his chest & supposed he arrived at the true diagnosis of his case -- in addition to the lung complaint he had an enlargement of the heart -- Drs. do not always know -- Eli got well.[31]

---

[31] Shaker Record B, p. 170.

CHAPTER VIII

Peculiarly Shaker

The singing and dancing of the Shakers have been regarded as special characteristics of this sect. Indeed, the dancing caused them to be called "Shakers." However, these manifestations of a religious spirit were not peculiar only to the Believers in the early days of the movement. The hopping about and speaking in unknown tongues were aspects of the Great Revival in Kentucky among several denominations, including Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian. The reports of this religious fervor stimulated the interest of the Eastern Shakers, who sent missionaries to the West in an effort to take advantage of the new spirit in religion being evinced on the frontier.

Thomas Clark in his account of the early days in Kentucky includes a story of the Cane Ridge meeting of 1801 where people were "compelled by the spirit" to take part in falling, jerking, running, and climbing exercises.[1] Russel Blaine Nye writes that "with little or no ministry to keep theological order, frontier Methodism and Baptism became almost folk religions."[2]

---

[1] Thomas D. Clark, A History of Kentucky (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1937), p. 399.

[2] Nye, p. 217.

As some of the Kentucky members of the frontier churches were persuaded to join the Shakers, they brought with them the dancing and shouting that had come to be the demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's work upon them. Not all the early Shakers were quick to accept the dancing:

> . . . . Jno Bryant Sen who had opened his mind -- was opposed to dancing returned home from Shawnee Run in confusion, while feeling opposed was taken with the jerks -- was released but still opposed, was seized again in the woods he seized a buckeye sapling but was jerked into willing obedience & now has full faith in dancing![3]

A similar tale of another unbeliever outside the colony is contained in Kentucky Tradition:

> There is a tale of a Barren County youth who went to a nearby meeting house to make fun of the jerkers. The denomination of this church was not given. However, he fell victim to the spell of religious fervor and ran from the meeting house jerking his neck and limbs and foaming at the mouth. . . . he was up and off through the woods, baying like a prize fox hound. He finally stopped in front of a big tree and with his hands raised upward, claimed to have "treed the devil."[4]

The speaking in "unknown tongues" was common to the fundamentalist religions of 1800 and was also part of the Shaker worship. After a number of years, the Shakers developed songs used in service, many of which came to the individuals as a "gift" or inspiration from heaven, angels or departed Shakers.

---

[3] Shaker Record A, p. 77.

[4] Lawrence S. Thompson, Kentucky Tradition (Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, 1956), p. 105.

Some of the subjects of the songs were similar to those being sung in the neighboring churches, such as the ones picturing heavenly scenes and anticipation of eternal life. Also common were warring songs (i.e., war against sin) which had their counterparts in fundamentalist hymnals of the day. Since the Shakers believed in celibacy, some of their songs reflected their intention to spurn all earthly pleasures as in this verse:

> Oh how I hate the flesh -- Oh how I hate the flesh
> Let us put it under foot -- Then let us keep it there.[5]

Any member of the Shaker colony could receive a "gift" and compose songs. Some of the compositions seem to indicate that the authors may have been relatively uneducated, but exceptionally earnest.

> I want to be simple and free
> I want to be Mothers little baby
> I mean to be meek and lowly
> I mean to be Mothers little child
> I mean to be pure and holy
> And keep my conscience undefild.[6]

The shaking or dancing, with other simple motions, was a part of the worship service. The following song illustrates some of these motions:

> Bound up and wound up,
> Don't you hate to feel so bound up and wound up
> All in bonds and fetters
> O come, shake it off Break it off, Break it off.
> Shaking into liberty and life and simple freedom.[7]

---

[5] Jean Healan Thomason, Shaker Manuscript Hymnals of South Union, Kentucky (Bowling Green, Kentucky: Kentucky Folklore Record, 1966), p. 26.

[6] Ibid., p. 25.

[7] Ibid.

The dancing also underwent changes as the Shaker colonies became established in Kentucky.

> Their former custom of expressing themselves in uncoordinated movement became more stylized, becoming patterned and disciplined. Various forms of these marches were developed, such as quick marches, shuffle marches, and round dances.[8]

Elsewhere in Kentucky the violent jerking movements calmed down within the churches, but dances similar to the Shaker dances continued to be a part of the social life of the community.

Certain customs developed within the Shaker groups and became traditional within their societies. Occasionally these found their way to the outside world as well. Within the colonies their farming methods and earnest application of labor produced an ample supply of food. Each Shaker could take as much as he wished but he must finish everything on his plate. From this has come the admonition to "Shaker your plate" or eat everything on it.[9]

The color "Shaker Red," although not an exact designation, has come to have common use. This same term was used outside the village also for a particular kind of sweet potato grown at South Union.

---

[8] Ibid., p. 1.

[9] Marjorie Hallman, Dictionary of American Folklore (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 267.

The "union smoke" is an interesting Shaker custom for which no parallel has been found in the surrounding regions. Several entries describe this custom:

> Flax Pulling -- Before finishing Mercy & Myself went out to the flax field (30 acres) & gave all the sisters a drink of wine -- lit our pipes & took a union smoke! Molly[10]

Sometimes they had a joint meeting in spirit with another Shaker village by pre-arrangement:

> Union Smoke -- Christmas -- By invitation the Church had a union smoke today with the Chh at Union Village [Ohio] long stem pipes were supplied for all that could take a whiff. So for 15 or 20 minutes we were enveloped in clouds of tobacco smoke, & chatted & sang and on the whole enjoyed our union with our friends over the River immensely. Had a good time generally & particularly.[11]

Another description of a similar meeting is complete with a song composed for the celebration.

> Union Smoke -- At 4 o'clock P.M. all the families had a Union Smoke with our good friends at Union Village. At the beginning, sang a song suitable for the occasion, beginning thus:
>
> Come good children gather in,
> Let our union smoke begin
> Here is union all may see
> from the village flowing free
> Union is the pearl of life,
> Union conquers every strife
> Union by the spirit spoke
> Bro't about this union smoke, etc. etc.
> Receive their love upon the spot
> From the village smoking hot.[12]

---

[10] Shaker Record A, p. 179.

[11] Ibid., p. 387.

[12] Ibid., p. 396.

The Shaker bonnet was usually made of rye straw with handwoven silk skirt.[13] Donning the Shaker bonnet for the women evidenced their acceptance of the Shaker faith.

> Today Molly Hawkins joined by making a beginning to confess her sins and put on the Shaker cap.[14]

---

[13] Moore, p. 97.

[14] Ibid., p. 202.

CONCLUSION

The United Society of Believers lived among, yet also apart from, the people of South-Central Kentucky for more than a century. Some of the Shakers lived their entire lifetime in the village. Others came for shorter periods and left, on occasion returning, some leaving and returning several times. Through this latter group there was frequent and continuous contact with the outside world. Further, the village took in orphans and other children where a surviving parent could not care for them, thus again affording contact with those living in the region around the village. Their economic efforts also brought them in daily contact with outsiders, even as far away as Georgia and New Orleans. As they marketed their seeds, tow linen, carpeting, brooms and preserves, they became a part of the business, if not the social, activities of the region. Neighbors and strangers came to South Union to use the grist mill, to buy produce and hand-manufactured goods, to have cloth dressed and dyed, and simply to visit.

The community was a bi-racial society, since a black family was included from the first establishment of the society. All of these Negroes were free after the mid 1830's, and many remained at South Union.

The colony tried to maintain a neutral position during the Civil War despite the fact that it was opposed to slavery. The Shakers suffered economic losses and emotional distress at the hands of soldiers on both sides while the war was being fought. They shared with their neighbors the privations of the period. Indeed, so severe were these, that the colony never regained its earlier vigor following the war and its ravages.

The farm work at South Union was carried on much as was the work on the surrounding farms. However, the Shakers differed from their neighbors in that communal effort was the mode within the village, whereas community work was occasional on the outside. They deliberately made recreation an essential ingredient in their lives and picnics and outings were frequent. The forms of recreation in which they participated were in general similar to those of their neighbors.

The journals record speech, thought, customs, and beliefs that have been found to be prevalent in Kentucky during the nineteenth century. The Shakers' attitudes toward diseases were attitudes commonly held in Kentucky at that time, and they treated the sick with the same herbs and folk remedies used by the "saddlebags doctors" who ministered to families across the state.

Being, in a very real sense, a society apart, the Shakers developed a set of customs and practices which were peculiar to their special way of life. Many other journal entries record matters not especially relevant to Shakerism. With reference to a significant number of these, there appears to be a direct relationship between them and the life of the "larger community" outside the colony. In a large measure, the journals of the Shaker colony at South Union present an accurate reflection of many of the customs and folkways of American -- particularly Kentucky -- life in the nineteenth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

SHAKER RECORD A. A journal of the South Union Shaker Colony from 1804 to 1836, kept by the Ministry and transcribed from original notes and diaries by H. L. Eades in 1870.

SHAKER RECORD B. A journal of the South Union Shaker Colony from 1836 to 1852, kept by the Ministry and transcribed from original notes and diaries by H. L. Eades in 1870.

SHAKER RECORD C. A journal of the South Union Shaker Colony from 1853 to 1864, kept by the Ministry and transcribed from original notes and diaries by H. L. Eades in 1870.

SHAKER RECORD D. A journal of the South Union Shaker Colony from 1865 to 1870, kept by the Ministry and transcribed from original notes and diaries by H. L. Eades in 1870.

SHAKER JOURNAL 1871-1872. Kept by the Ministry.

Secondary Sources

Andrews, Charles M. Colonial Folkways. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919.

Andrews, Edward Deming and Andrews, Faith. Religion in Wood. A Book of Shaker Furniture. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.

_____. Shaker Furniture. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937.

Andrews, Edward Deming. The Community Industries of the Shakers. Albany, New York: The University of the State of New York, 1933.

_____. The Gift to be Simple. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1940.

_____. The People Called Shakers. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963.

Brewer, E. Cobham. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963.

Clark, Thomas D. A History of Kentucky. New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1937.

_____. Kentucky: Land of Contrast. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968.

Cook, J. F. Old Kentucky. New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908.

Davenport, F. Garvin. Ante-Bellum Kentucky, A Social History, 1800-1860. Oxford, Ohio: The Mississippi Valley Press, 1943.

Dodd, William E. The Old South. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937.

Drake, Daniel. Pioneer Life in Kentucky, ed. Emmet Field Horien. New York: Henry Schuman, 1948.

Duncan, Fannie Casseday. When Kentucky Was Young. Louisville, Kentucky: John P. Morton & Company, 1928.

Eaton, Clement. A History of the Old South. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949.

_____. Freedom of Thought in the Old South. New York: Peter Smith, 1951.

Edwards, Cyrus. Cyrus Edward's Stories of Early Days, ed. Florence Edwards Gardiner. Louisville, Kentucky: The Standard Printing Company, Inc., 1940.

Firor, Ruth. Folkways in Thomas Hardy. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931.

Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language. International Edition. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1958.

Gibson, Marywebb. Shakerism in Kentucky. Cynthiana, Kentucky: The Hobson Press, 1942.

Giles, Janice Holt. The Believers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957.

Greene, Nancy Lewis. Ye Olde Shaker Bells. Lexington, Kentucky: Transylvania Printing Company, 1930.

Leach, Maria (ed.). Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend. Two Volumes. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1950.

Lockwood, George B. The New Harmony Movement. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905.

Mathews, Mitford McLeod. Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

McMeekin, Clark. Old Kentucky Country. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1957.

McNemar, Richard. The Kentucky Revival. New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1846.

Melcher, Margurite F. The Shaker Adventure. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

Moore, Nancy E. The Journal of Eldress Nancy, ed. Mary Julia Neal. Nashville, Tennessee: The Parthenon Press, 1963.

Murray, Sir James A. H., et. al. Oxford English Dictionary. Ten Volumes and Supplement. London: Oxford University Press, 1888-1933.

Neal, Julia. By Their Fruits. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947.

Nordhoff, Charles. The Communistic Societies of the United States (1794-1875). New York: Hillary House Publishers Ltd., 1961.

Nye, Russel Blaine. The Cultural Life of the New Nation. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960.

Piercy, Caroline. The Valley of God's Pleasure. New York: Stratford House, 1951.

Phelps, Sister Lillian. Shaker Music. Canterbury, New Hampshire: n.p., n.d.

Philips, Ulrich Bonnell. Life and Labor in the Old South. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1930.

Roberts, Leonard W. Up Cutshin and Down Greasy. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959.

Robinson, Charles Edson. A Concise History of the United Society of Believers called Shakers. East Canterbury, New Hampshire: n.p., 1893.

Sears, Clara Endicott. Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916.

Taylor, Archer, and Whiting, Bartlett Jere. Dictionary of American Proverbs & Proverbial Phrases, 1820-1880. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1958.

Thomas, Daniel Lindsay and Thomas, L. B. Kentucky Superstitions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1920.

Thomason, Jean Healan. Shaker Manuscript Hymnals of South Union, Kentucky. Bowling Green, Kentucky: Kentucky Folklore Record, 1966.

Thompson, Lawrence S. Kentucky Tradition. Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, 1956.

Thompson, Stith. Motif-Index of Folk Literature. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1955.

Webber, Everett. Escape to Utopia: The Communal Movement in America. New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1959.

Wentworth, Harold. American Dialect Dictionary. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1944.

White, Anna and Taylor, Lelia S. Shakerism Its Meaning and Message. Columbus, Ohio: Fred J. Heer Press, 1904.

White, Newman Ivey (General Editor). The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore. Five Volumes. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1952.

Wilson, Gordon. Passing Institutions. Cynthiana, Kentucky: The Hobson Book Press, 1944.

Articles and Periodicals

Hunter, Earl D. "Folk Remedies of Man and Beast," Kentucky Folklore Record, VIII (July-September, 1962), 97-108.

Wilson, Gordon. "Folk Medicines in the Mammoth Cave Region," Tennessee Folklore Bulletin (June, 1965), 33-41.

_____, "Mammoth Cave Words, VIII: Some Useful Adjectives," Kentucky Folklore Record, XII (October-December, 1966), 119-122.

_____, "Swallow It or Rub It On," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXXI (December, 1967), 296-303.

_____, "Talismans and Magic in Folk Remedies," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXX (June, 1966), 192-201.

_____, "The Shakers and Birds," Kentucky Warbler, 20: 19-20, 1944.

Unpublished Material

Fentress, Elza E. "Superstitions of Grayson County." Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, Western Kentucky State College, 1934.

Keith, John M., Jr. "The Economic Development of the South Union Shaker Colony 1807-1861." Unpublished Master's thesis, Graduate School, Western Kentucky State College, 1965.

Washington, Mary Louise. "The Folklore of the Cumberlands as Reflected in the Writings of Jesse Stuart." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Folklore, University of Pennsylvania, 1960.

Other Sources

Personal interview with Mrs. John Meredith, Allen County, Kentucky, at Western Kentucky University, June, 1967.

Personal interview with Mrs. Clinton Rigsby, Bowling Green, Kentucky, March, 1968.

Personal interviews with Miss Julia Neal, Director, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, March, 1967 to April, 1968.

Personal interviews with Gordon Wilson, March, 1968 to May, 1968.

Gordon Wilson Folklore Collection, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Wilson, Gordon. Tidbits of Kentucky Folklore, No. 1703. Collection in the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

B9, F2